

Explore the Faith

Faith seeking understanding

Four stages of Mystical Prayer in Teresa of Avila

In her Autobiography, Teresa of Avila shares four stages of mystical prayer. Her goal is to inspire you to want to grow in these ways!

INTRODUCTION

Why did Teresa write about these four stages of mystical prayer? She put it this way:

| *my chief aim is to cause souls to covet so sublime a blessing*

In other words, her goal is **to inspire you to want these things!** Our lives would be so much better if we strove after these things.

In most cases, we do not receive them instantly. Instead, most of us will invest long eras of prayer in each stage before we are advanced.

Here are the four stages:

1. [Meditation](#)
2. [The Prayer of Quiet](#)
3. [Union](#)
4. [Rapture](#)

1. MEDITATION

Meditation is the first stage of mystical prayer. Teresa also calls it devotions, disciplined prayer, and mental prayer.

Beginners learn to meditate on the life of Jesus Christ. They come to feel tenderness and an interior feeling of devotion. They might become enkindled with great love.

Meditation can be achieved, at least partly, by our own efforts. That is in sharp contrast with all the stages that follow. They *cannot* be achieved by our own efforts.

Some people who meditate are not sure they have repented of their sins. They need to outgrow that.

Meditation is a lot of work. That work fatigues their minds.

These beginners should aim to be be happy and free and confident. They should attempt great things. They should cease to be anxious about anything and anybody. They should innore aridities and distractions.

Meditation is a a most excellent and safe road until the Lord leads us to the stages that follow. Those are supernatural.

Reference: the *Life of Teresa of Jesus*, [chapter 11](#) and [chapter 12](#) and [chapter 13](#)

2. THE PRAYER OF QUIET

The Prayer of Quiet is the second stage of mystical prayer.

It is a prayer-state that borders on the supernatural. Unlike meditation, we cannot achieve the Prayer of Quiet by our own efforts. We are unable to do anything to acquire this blessing.

When it arrives, we are to put our meditation and other prayer practices aside and simply rest in it. It puts us in a state of quiet and recollectedness.

It reveals grace to us more clearly, and fills us with a deep inner satisfaction. Our faculties are not lost, nor do they sleep. It never becomes wearisome.

We are in union with God for as long as the Prayer of Quiet lasts. If it is intense, it becomes difficult to speak except with great distress.

When we experience the Prayer of Quiet, it seems that no greater blessing is even possible. For that reason, while many people are given this, few people go beyond it.

However, much greater things are in store.

Reference: the *Life of Teresa of Jesus*, [chapter 14](#) and [chapter 15](#)

3. UNION

Your faculties fall asleep, and you become absorbed in union. It is a union of your entire soul with God.

The pleasure and sweetness and delight you experience are incomparably greater than in the Prayer of Quiet.

Even your body shares in the soul's joy and delight. Sometimes the soul seems to be on the point of leaving the body.

The faculties retain only the power of occupying themselves wholly with God; not one of them, it seems, ventures to stir.

Your own mind might try to distract you. Ignore it, whether the distractions come from your will or your memory or your imagination.

The Lord granted Teresa this prayer *in abundance*.

Reference: the *Life of Teresa of Jesus*, [chapter 16](#) and [chapter 17](#)

4. RAPTURE

During Rapture, all your faculties fade away and are suspended. The Lord gathers up your soul. Your soul no longer seems to animate your body. Your hearing and thinking are dimmed. And you are carried away. Gently. Joyfully. Silently. Ecstatically.

There is no power left in your body. Your eyes involuntarily close. Your breath diminishes. Your pulse slows. You can hardly move your hands without great effort. You feel such bliss and consolation that you would never abandon it. And we willingly go wherever we are carried away.

Your soul soars upwards, far above itself and above all created things.

Sometimes the Rapture was so powerful that Teresa's body was lifted up off the ground. Literally. Her fellow nuns held down her body.

Rapture is much more beneficial than union. It is of exceeding worth.

Teresa had other words for Rapture. She also called it elevation, flight of the spirit, transport, ecstasy.

Nobody will believe this without having had experience of it.

Reference: the *Life of Teresa of Jesus*, [chapter 18](#) and [chapter 19](#) and [chapter 20](#) and [chapter 21](#)

[LIFE OF TERESA OF JESUS](#)

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I was given a great gift. It is to be passionate about Jesus Christ and the Bible and the spiritual life. I am a Christian believer. I believe in Jesus Christ. I'm in love with Jesus! I believe the Bible. I love the Bible. For decades, I've been reading it cover-to-cover, again and again and again. I've memorized a whole lot of Bible verses. Most of all, I want the Bible to help us fall more deeply in love with God the Father, with Jesus Christ, with other people, and with ourselves. And I've been reading the great writings from the entire Christian heritage for decades. At Explore the Faith, I share what I have discovered.

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